



# COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PACESETTER DUBUQUE

## Category: School Readiness

Dubuque, located along the Mississippi River, is Iowa's oldest and seventh-largest city, with 58,000 residents. It is a regional center for commerce, industry, education, medical services, culture and tourism. Despite generally high percentages of students ready for school by age 5, Dubuque is seeing a disproportionate number of students from at-risk populations who are not prepared to succeed in school. To guarantee that all Dubuque children enter kindergarten ready to learn, the community has built strong and innovative collaborations among dozens of agencies and providers. As a result, more children are born healthy, thriving at age 3 and ready for kindergarten.

To ensure a healthy start, the Crescent Community Health Center provides access to early child health care, especially for the community's most underserved members. As of 2011, the center was serving more than 600 low-income children under 5.

The Visiting Nurse Association's oral health program served 3,599 children as part of Iowa's I-Smile Oral Health initiative, screening children at clinics, schools and preschools throughout the community. The nurses collaborate with other medical providers to ensure quality developmental screening during well-child exams through the 1st Five Initiative. In the last six months of 2011, the Visiting Nurse Association provided 466 children with care coordination, referral and follow-up.

The community has also built collaborations to ensure that families have the skills necessary to raise thriving 3-year-olds. Dubuque County Early Childhood coordinates a Born Learning Initiative that offers resources to parents and caregivers to increase early learning through everyday activities. The program pioneered a Born Learning activity curriculum and has trained more than 70 "trusted messengers" who are targeting at-risk families for maximum impact.

Parents as Teachers, a research-based, outcome-driven program, assists parents in being their children's first and most important teachers. Home visits, screenings, classroom observations and resource networking help children enter kindergarten as confident learners. Parents as Teachers serves 688 children from 458 families in the community.

An innovative collaboration between schools and more than 23 child care providers supports the State-Wide Voluntary Preschool Program. This program offers 10 free hours of preschool per week to all 4-year-olds, employing a state-licensed teacher, highly qualified para-educators, an evidence-based curriculum and ongoing professional development for teachers.

A kindergarten survey administered by Dubuque County Early Childhood shows that Dubuque presently has a school readiness rate of 97 percent. The survey asks whether a child has attended preschool and collects data about a student's social/emotional development, gross motor development, fine motor development, cognitive development and language development. The survey has a greater than 90 percent response rate from kindergarten families, giving program leaders a clear picture of successes and opportunities.

## STRATEGIES

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- Provided all children with access to early child health care
- Offered resources to parents and caregivers
- Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program offered free preschool to all 4-year-olds
- Administered a survey to identify areas of weakness for continued improvement